

THE DOOR

By Armen Hakhnazarian

Horizon 2020



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CONTENTS

The Door.....	4
As a supplement.....	12
Armen Hakhnazarian.....	13
Samvel Karapetian.....	14
Visit to The Door.....	15

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Armen Hakhnazarian and Samvel Karapetian*

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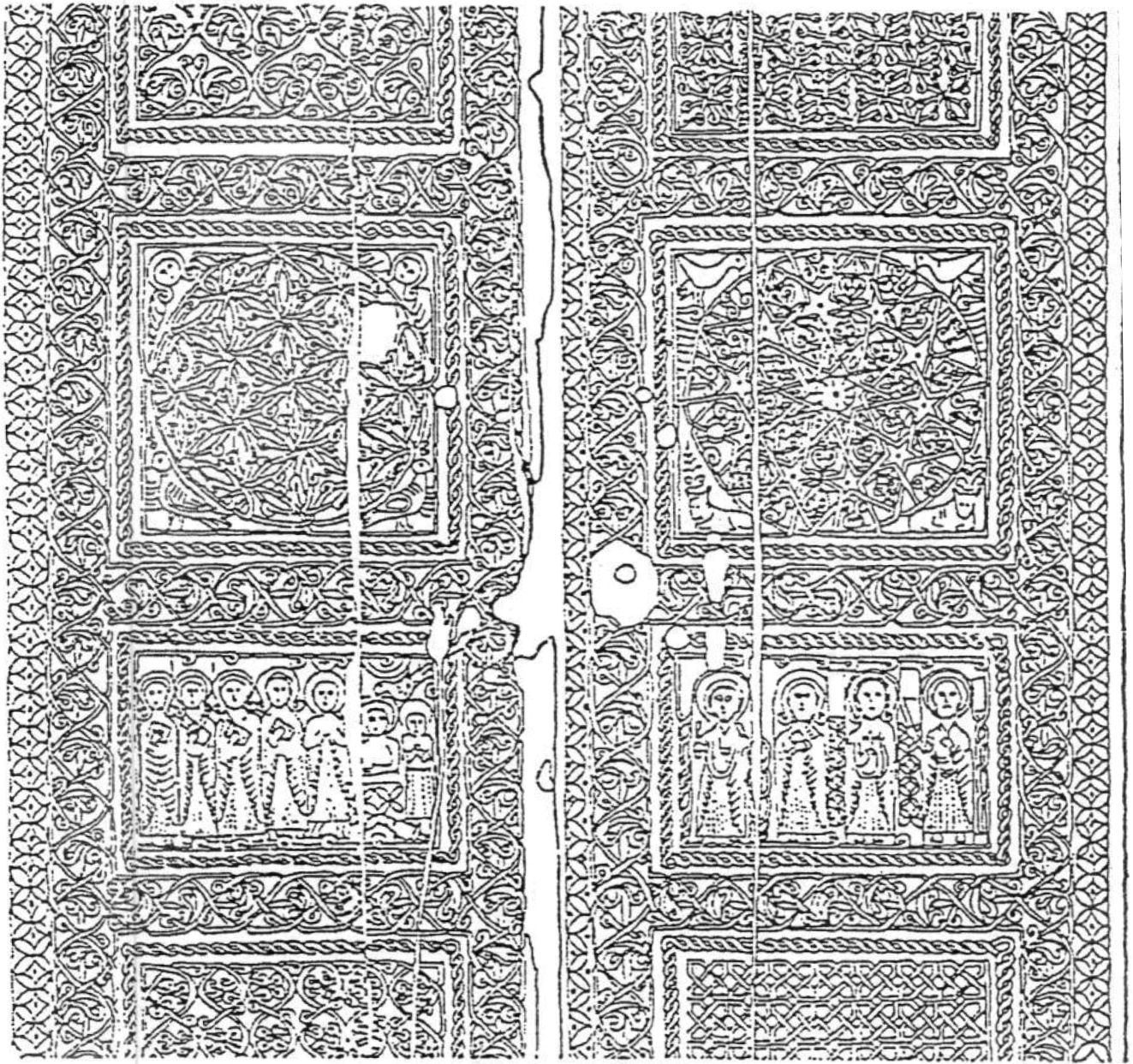
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Դռան միջին բաժնի գրչանկարը

Մ. Հախնազարեան

Ink drawing of the middle part of the Door

by M. Hakhnazarian

THE DOOR

1975, *Tehran*. It was near the end of the year. The holidays were upon us and the greeting cards and letters were piling up, decorated with beautiful printing but containing at most only one handwritten sentence, one signature. A form of communication in the modern world, an annual tradition that means to say, “we still have not forgotten you...”

There are also exceptions; for instance, one from Istanbul with a postage stamp bearing the picture of Ataturk.

I open the envelope to find two typewritten pages on thin paper, with two black and white pictures in folded papers.

The letter was signed by Mrs. Richter. She writes about their neighbour, a retired high-ranking military officer, who often goes hunting with his son, in the forested mountains of Sassoon. The officer, General Ily Sayid, knows the area from his years of military service and has connections in the villages.

That year, the chief of the village of ‘Tenkit’ (Tnget) had sent him the news:

“A huge bear from Mount Malato (Marout) has been seen in our area and is causing a lot of damage to our village. Sir, we are waiting for you; save us from this danger.”

Father and son depart, but it was too late in the season. In the region of Mush they get caught in early winter snow storms. They lose their direction in the snow and somehow reach the village of Hirgit (Herkert).

Guest at the home of the chief of the village for days, when the storm subsides, with the help of the villagers and their mules, they push and pull their vehicle out of the snowdrifts, bring it to the main road, and return to Istanbul.

At the home of the chief of the village, for four days they enjoy the freshly baked bread and the warm seat which helps them to sleep, watch the unrelenting snow from the small opening in the wall and spend their nights, desperately fighting the bed bugs...

On the third day, the chief, after a few hints, gets the courage and trusting the visitors from the city, with much hesitation takes them to the cellar next to his barn, where under a pile of straw, he had hidden the “old object”: the door.

“Sir, what do you think we should do? The door is big and heavy. Taking it to Istanbul to sell is dangerous: the police are often searching and giving us a hard time if they notice antique goods. My brother is in the market of Sivas and I have a son in Istanbul. We are thinking about cutting it into smaller pieces along the lines of the carvings and selling it to tourists. What is your advice?” We are in bad shape financially and need the money urgently.

Father and son look at each other. In the darkness of the cellar, the dark-coloured wooden double door with its high-relief carvings conveys a sense of mystery.

You know Sir”, at last speaks the son of the military officer, “in Istanbul our neighbour is German and in his house he has some antiques that he has collected. Before you cut the door up in pieces, let’s take a picture and show it to him, maybe he would like it and buy it”. “Wait, don’t cut it into pieces yet, the value will go down”, added the father.

“Will the value go down? Fine, we will wait to hear from you, Sir”. He covers the door back with straw.

“So Mr. Hakhnazarian, we are sending you the pictures taken by our neighbour. The payment desired by the Kurds for the door is approximately five thousand German marks; what is your opinion? It seems to us that the price is too high.”

The double door had without a doubt belonged to an Armenian church, and although the pictures were small and of poor quality, some characters were visible on one panel but they were

not legible.

I read the letter, looking at the pictures with a magnifying glass occasionally. Caught with unexpected excitement, I respond to the letter the same day, with a two-line note: “The door is Armenian. Try to find a way to transport it from the region of Mush to Istanbul. I wait for your news.

There are many questions: what church did the door belong to? And when was it built? It is obvious that it is not the door of a simple village church. “

In April, I receive the package sent by Mr. Richter, the volume dedicated to the buildings designed by architect Sinan of Armenian origin. I flip through the pages of the book and find an Easter greeting card. The text of the card is unremarkable and doesn't say much, save for one word, hidden between the lines, which speaks volumes: “Changily”...

I read it again and again. I really can not believe it, that the door actually belonged to “Changily”, torn off from there and taken away. Indeed I am not able to believe!

The name “Changily” awakes in me a sea of memories and feelings, that are related to my years of travel to Western Armenia. Travels through the traces of Armenian architecture, to salvage the relics of lost buildings that could no longer be rebuilt. The mere sight of a picture or the surveyed drawing չափազրուքիւ of a chapel and again in my mind I am walking by the roads of the past, standing at the edge of a cliff to breathe and I am living in me the abyss of despair.

In May 1976 I receive another card from Istanbul with Mr. Richter's signature. “Stop by Istanbul during your next trip to Europe and be our guest for a few days. The Bosphorus spring is *unlike* others.” He had stressed the word “unlike”.

Mr. Richter met me at the Yeshilkoy Airport about half an hour outside of Istanbul.

“Yeshilkoy” was once the Greek village named San Stefano which is forever entwined with the history of the Armenian people. A name which is closely related to Father Khrimian's ladle and the Article 16, as the true sign of the Armenian Question put to auction, later turned into Article 61. *(Note of the translator: It was here in San Stefano that the preliminary treaty ending the Russo-Turkish War had been negotiated, Article 16 of which mandated that the Ottoman Empire guarantee the safety and security of the Armenian people living under its rule. As described by Father Khrimian's sermon of the “paper ladle”, a plea which the Armenians presented, instead of having an “iron ladle”, meaning arms to defend themselves, that guarantee was auctioned away by the negotiating powers and relegated to Article 61 when the treaty was finalized three months later in Berlin).*

We both know the matter in question and the real reason for my visit; however, on the drive from the airport, there is no mention of it. I wait for him to raise the subject.

We reach their three-storey house at the shores of Bosphorus. In the foyer I glance impatiently at the antiquities on display but note nothing unusual. I am accompanied to the guestroom, where I place my luggage and we retire to the balcony for tea.

We are sitting on the balcony, the teacups are emptied, as well as the courteous questions and answers.

Mr. Richter slowly stands up and tells me in a mysterious low voice: “Let's go. “

He opens the door, invites me in. A small bedroom, high white walls, wooden floor, the bed covered with white sheets, a chair, a cross on the wall and leaning against the wall an object covered with a white bedsheet. He closes the door, slowly and silently removes and folds the bedsheet. The dark coloured wooden double door is in front of me at a touching distance. For me this is a miracle. A handful of culture rescued from the massacres.

A geometric decorative belt is bordering each of the two leaves of the door and is followed by a wider decorative belt with a vegetal theme. The same vegetal belts divide the surface of

the doors into four parts. The lowest and upper two parts are squares, while the second section from below is narrower and rectangular. The eight sections mentioned above, are bordered with a winding rope design.

In the three squares of each door there are beautiful decorative carvings. The right door has geometrical decorations and the left door has floral decorations.

The squares at the centres of the panels are highlighted with circular, flowery woven carvings; the corners adorned with two angels, birds and animals. All this is reminiscent of the nucleus typically found at the bottom of khatchkars (memorial crosses) symbolizing the sanctity of life and eternity.

The ornament of the door, however, is the carving of the apostles and saints standing in the two rectangles. At the left, there are seven saints, five of whom look like each other, while two are smaller, one of which bears the sign of the Holy Spirit, representing the baptism of Christ. On the right, there are the four apostles separated by small columns, Peter holding the key, Paul holding the sword.

In addition to the beautiful carvings that convey the history, there is the mark of Armenian origin in the writings found at the front and bottom of the door leaves, that are mostly well legible.

The area around the lock of the door has been punctured by bullets and completely destroyed. The tops and bottoms of the doors have been badly damaged by nails.

The writings are:

At the top of the right door:

“This Door of St. Karapet was built by Mr. Markos”

At the bottom of the right door:

“In 1512 of the Armenian Calendar Shamakure and for his parents”

At the top of the left door:

“And his son Mr. Mirapet from Amzat”

At the bottom of the left door:

“I Sarepin who put together...”

I transcribe it quickly, stand up and put the paper in my pocket. The door gets covered again with the white sheet. We go downstairs, the dinner is ready. The servant is coming back and forth. We are eating, I believe tasty food, but my mind is elsewhere, the only topic of the conversation is the door.

“Let me tell you the story”, starts Mr. Richter after wiping lightly his mouth with the napkin. “You cannot imagine the difficulties we went through to bring the door from the village to the city, hidden under household goods, and was brought into the house somehow, under the cover of night, not through the main entrance but through the garden entrance where the wall was being renovated. You know, our other neighbour is the editor of the Hurriyet Turkish daily newspaper and we have to be very careful, do you understand?”

“OK, so far we have succeeded, however keeping it in our house is a problem too, it could become dangerous for us also. This is an antiquity and as such is considered a national treasure and taking it out of the country is forbidden.”

When I hinted about repaying them for the purchase, after a short silence Mrs. Richter said: “You know, we have paid willingly, let’s leave it that way, since for the time being it is here

and we are enjoying its beauty; if, with your help, we could get it out of the country, then you will have the priority and we'll think something about it..."

It was late when I went up to my room, went to bed, but I could not sleep. I sat out on the balcony. Under the moonlight, I could see the shadows of a few fishing boats at a distance; it was quiet; you could barely hear the calming sounds of the waves. Within me there was a storm. The day's events and the memories of the past were pushing each other, raising new questions and upsetting me.

Today in Turkey, the place called "Changily" (meaning "with bells" in Kurdish), is the site of the renowned Surb Karapet monastery.

The Surb Karapet monastery is located about 35 km northeast of the city of Mush.

I remember, we had left Mush before the sunrise and headed north. After passing the village of Garnen (Karni) we crossed Meghraked (Karasou) to the village of Khoper (Hoper) on the other side. We then turned to the west and travelled through Goms (Kumous), Palas (Palas), Tom (Dom), and Ziaret (Tsiaret), Armenian villages for centuries today inhabited by Kurds. As a result of heavy rains two days ago, the dirt road was often impassable. We reached Dersim by error and from there we finally arrived to Sordar (Sordak) much later than we had planned. We left our car full of supplies at the tea house in the centre of the village. We had some tea and when we wanted to go up the Karke mountain to visit the Surb Karapet monastery, our Kurdish guide tried to convince us not to go there: "the people living in Changily are violent Kurds; they are not like us..."

Along a narrow road, winding around a creek, we make our way up the mountainside, on one side there are barren rocks and on the other side valleys with walnut and chestnut trees.

For hours we climb following the traces of candle wax; sanctified stones everywhere. On the upper plateau we find the ruins of the Fort of Moushegh Mamikonian, on the other side the opposite rock is known as the "Girls' Stone". The higher we climb, the more frequently we pass through groves of sycamore (sossie) trees. Sossies were the symbol of pagan Armenians. They would go to battle with flags depicting the sossie tree. The Sossie of Goghtan is 2600 years old; under its shade, Mesrop Mashtots is said to have invented the Armenian alphabet.

Typically, Armenian monasteries are built in valleys, hidden behind mountains. Surb Karapet is at the top of the mountain and can be seen from all around, and high, so high that it is possible to be near God ...

Glakavank.

Innaknian vank.

Msho Sultan Surb Karapet.

These are the names by which is known, one of the most ancient and holiest places of the Armenian faith, second only to Ejmiatzin in its significance.

Like many of the oldest Christian churches, this one has also been built on the ruins of a pagan temple. The temple had housed the idols of Gissane(h) and Dimitre. It was destroyed by Surb Grigor Loussavorich (St. Gregory the Illuminator), who founded the monastery by placing the remains of St. Karapet and the bishops of Athangine(h).

The first Abbot of the monastery was Zenob Glak, the assistant to St. Gregory the Illuminator, in whose name it was also called Glaka Vank.

The monastery had many everflowing springs, of which, not very far north, was the famous Avag (Grand) fountain; then there were the fountains of the Illuminator, Bareham (Savoury) and Akanakit, nine springs flowing side-by-side, and for that reason the monastery was also called Innaknian Vank (Monastery with nine springs).

Throughout its history the monastery has been destroyed and rebuilt a number of times. In the 7th century it was completely destroyed by an earthquake, after which its main church,

St. Stephanos, was built. In the 11th century Grigor Magistros Bahlavouni built a palace on the grounds of the monastery, however in 1058 it burned down along with the wooden structure of St Gregory church.

In 1750, during the Turkish-Persian wars, the monastery was looted and the church was burned down.

In the mid-eighteenth century, during the Armenian liberation movement led by Joseph Emin, under the direction of Abbot Hovnan, the monastery became a major political centre. The earthquake of 1784 ruined the church again. The different parts of the monastery were rebuilt in 1788, by extending the lobby, and renovating the bell tower, the living quarters of the monks, the library, with ramparts etc.

The complex consisted of the monastery and the churches, surrounded by high ramparts. The two-storey residences of the clergy were separated from the rooms of the pilgrims by walls. The monastery contained the library, the dining area, the treasury etc.

The church was an entity with a square plan. It had a large nave supported by 16-columns, on the western side a vestibule/bell tower built in 1782, while the eastern part consisted of four chapels, the two centre ones being domed churches, while the outer two were single-naved basilicas.

On the west side of the church the bell tower rose upon 8 marble columns. For centuries the church bells had tolled, spreading their blessing over the widespread fields of Mush and the holy river Aratzani that crossed it.

Sultan Surb Karapet has been one of the most beloved pilgrimage sites for the Armenians. During the Vartavar and St Mary's Day celebrations, caravans of pilgrims have come to this sanctuary from the farthest corners of the country and large public celebrations were held at the courtyard and around the monastery: horseback riding, plays, songs and lyrics, competition of troubadours. The sanctuary had a reputation of healing powers and very sick pilgrims have been said to have visited it and returned home completely healed... As for the food, they would sacrifice one of the white oxen of the monastery. They would cook the food in large cauldrons and on those festive days, in God's house, both the commoners and the princes would share their meals as equals. A wonderful event symbolizing equality.

While writing these lines, I remember the vulgar scene of the pilgrimage to the monastery of Apostle St Tadeos, in present days, when the understanding of sacrifice is limited to the slaughtering of animals...

For centuries, Surb Karapet monastery had been a centre for science and literature. It had been one of the sources of spiritual strength for the Armenians and had hence become a target of the enemies of the Armenians.

In 1822 the monastery was attacked again. It was looted and a large number of valuable manuscripts were destroyed.

In 1863, Khrimian Hayrik was designated the spiritual leader of the monastery. He moved the printing house from Varaga monastery to Surb Karapet and with his student, Archbishop Garegin Servandziantz, started publishing the "Artzvik Taron" (Eagle of Taron) monthly.

Prior to the First World War, this monastery was one of the larger Armenian national, cultural and spiritual centres. The monastery operated a boarding school named "Zharangavorats" that had 80 students. Many of its graduates went on to become founders of schools in different parts of Western Armenia.

In 1915, in the midst of the Armenian Genocide, a large number of persecuted Armenians had found refuge in the monastery and its surrounding forests. The Turkish regular army and its Kurdish guerrilla fighters surrounded and attacked the monastery but met with resistance, leading to a siege that lasted close to two months. During that time the Abbot, Father Vartan, and two

priests managed to hide the monastery's ancient Armenian manuscripts and priceless treasures in three concealed vaults. The Turkish army bombarded the monastery with cannons and ultimately managed to breach the ramparts, entering the grounds from multiple locations with a desire to pillage and loot. There ensued a horrific massacre of the Armenian refugees on the grounds of the monastery. A few people managed to escape and reach Eastern Armenia. Among them was Hakob Danielian, a teacher of the Monastery, sole surviving witness who knew the locations of the hidden manuscripts, a secret he did not give away even at the expense of the lives of his wife and children.

In 1916, when the Russian Imperial Army's Armenian volunteer battalions captured Mush, Hakob Danielian returned with a special committee designated by the Catholicos to recover and relocate the treasures of Surb Karapet monastery to Ejmiatzin. The Turks had demolished the locations they thought could hide treasures, had exploded the three domes of the monastery and found and looted the contents of two of the caches. Fortunately, the manuscripts and the most valuable treasures had been secured in the third cache, which they had not been able to find (Grakan Tert 1.1.1990). 1 750 valuable manuscripts including the Bible of King Hetoom, the Golden Right Hand of Jesus, as well as the treasury of the monastery were transported to Ejmiatzin and saved.

We had walked about three hours and it seemed that we were getting close. We could hear the soothing sounds of the running water of the creeks around us. I didn't know which was which, but I assumed that the one running from the west side of the mountain, was coming from the fountain of the Illuminator. It flowed under two arches, filling the stone pond of King Terdat. In this pond, St. Gregory the Illuminator had baptized a large number of people.

On the right side of the walkway there was another spring. We kneel down and drink. It must be the "Bareham" spring. The water was so refreshing that you could never have enough of it.

We passed by innumerable dug-up graves, ruins and toppled tombstones. Who knows we may have even passed by the burial grounds and destroyed tombstones of Generalissimo (supreme commander) Sembat and his son Gayl Vahan Mamikonian.

We reach the Surb Karapet monastery at the top of the mountain, today a huge pile of ruins!

Stone is stone. However, when it has been cut and carved and polished it starts to talk, tell a story, even sing or protest; but when it is destroyed it starts to cry...

With pain in our hearts, we stand confused in front of the ruined memorial. We don't know what to do, which one to photograph, which one to measure, when a few stones, shot from a sling, whistle by close to us reminding us of where we were. We are being followed by suspicious, angry eyes from the ruins, wondering what were we photographing, where were we going, what were we looking for. Everywhere were pieces of carved stones, here and there were inscriptions, remnants of robust pillars. In one of the piles I notice a passage. I enter with difficulty into a dark cave, probably a chapel, with a beam of light inside. There was evidence of a search for valuable treasures everywhere, dug up holes and to my surprise, I see walls with traces of pagan origin, undeniable proof of the ancient pagan temple that had formed the foundation of the monastery... At another location we see twisted clay pipes. Were these an exclusive sample of a hot water or steam-based interior heating system? The temple being 2,200 meters above sea level, needed a means of protection from the extreme cold of the winter months.

I feel the smell of "tonir" (sunken oven) and freshly baked bread. A Kurdish grandmother, grumbling, smiles and offers hot lavash bread. I pick it up with thanks and realize that I was very hungry. I try to give her some money, but she says something and refuses to accept it. I eat the

lavash, which had a floral flavour, and I return to photographing the ruins.

Little by little the shadows cast by the rocks become longer, the evening is getting closer and in the distance, below, in the foggy fields of Mush, the sinuous river Aratzani looks like flowing silver.

We are preparing to leave the site. We drink once again the savoury water of the Bareham fountain. The place is peaceful; there is no noise; there is a deadly emptiness. There is a huge buried temple, the obituary of which is the silence. Only with silence it is possible to fill these innumerable pits...

We descend by the same road. It is still light, but the pale moon is already in the sky. We are silent. I am thinking that a land, that is hiding within it the history of so many victims and injustices, cannot be a happy land. I am thinking that, maybe for still a long time, this problem is ours and the land will belong to people who are not yet born...

The first pale light of dawn wakes me up. I get up. I have to pick up my luggage and reach the airport. I am peaceful and I see a small sliver of hope in the distance...

Two weeks later, in Tehran, I tell my father what I had seen and heard about the door. I ask him to write to Dr. Tsinzer and say that I need his advice.

Dr. Tsinzer had been the cultural attaché of the German embassy in Tehran. For a number of years, always on Thursday evenings, he had come to take grabar (classic armenian) language lessons from my father and had often stayed after, for dinner. A few years ago, he had received a promotion and moved to Ankara, the capital of Turkey.

Knowing my intentions, my father was initially hesitant, but eventually wrote a letter. The answer came very quickly. Dr. Tsinzer invited me to Ankara, promising to be of assistance. Of course, he had no idea what my request would be.

The same year in September, I organized a scientific excursion to Cilicia through the path of the Armenian fortresses. This gave me the opportunity to pass through Ankara.

At the set date, Dr. Tsinzer was at the airport and a bit later we were at his glorious house surrounded by a large garden. I told him in detail the story of Surb Karapet monastery and the story of the door of one of its churches. He listened to me without interrupting and when, at the end of my talk, I was getting ready to carefully make my main proposal, he guessed it, interrupted me and decisively refused, by saying it was impossible it amounted to smuggling....

The tiniest opening of hope was closed. I was very sad but could not do anything.

The next day, as previously planned, I met with two architects who had come from Germany and we departed together to Adana.

Months later, this time in a long letter sent from Vienna, Mr. Richter advised me with happiness that Dr. Tsinzer, on a trip to Istanbul, had called him and asked to see the door.

He writes on how Dr. Tsinzer had looked at the door for a long time without asking any questions and had said: "Ok, we will find a way out."

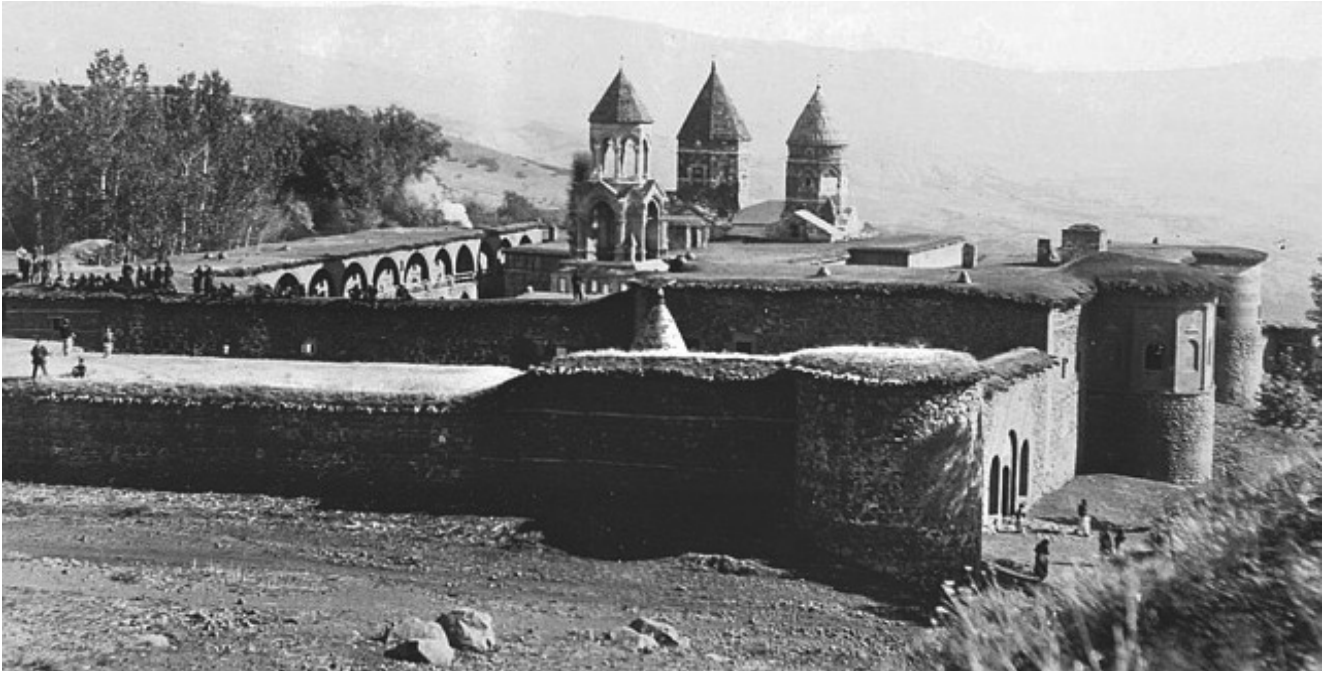
Excited, I immediately answer the letter, thinking that there was a small glimmer of hope and maybe that the kidnapped door was on its way home.

My letter remains unanswered. A few months later I send another letter. That also remains unanswered.

This silence was unusual. I feel there must have been something wrong.

More than a year later, altogether unexpectedly, I receive a letter written in a laconic style. Mrs. Richter advises that her husband had passed away and she had moved to Germany, to a suburb near Munich. At the end of the letter, with a short sentence, she reports that the door is now in Germany.

I go to Munich and by appointment I meet with Mrs. Richter in her small, tight residence. I find her very much changed and depressed. She tells me, with interruptions, wiping her eyes:



Մշոյ Ս. Կարապետ վանքը Յեղասպանութենէն առաջ
St. Karapet monastery before the Genocide

“Dr. Tsinzer truly helped us very much. My husband took the door to Ankara with great difficulty. From there Dr. Tsinzer, as a high-ranking embassy official, transported it as part of his personal belongings to Germany. It is in a storage site in the city of Frankfurt”.

Mrs. Richter continues her story: “Do you remember the servant we had at our house in Istanbul? We had noticed for some time that some things were missing from our house. It took a long time but we could prove for sure that her hands were not «clean». She had been stealing from us and so we fired her.”

“A few days later, altogether unexpectedly, four policemen came to our house and without saying much, arrested us, took us to jail and confiscated our belongings, accusing us of having traded in old and forbidden goods. It was clear that the words of the Turkish servant lady had more weight than our forty years’ history in this country, where my husband had been known as an exemplary official. Of course, we loved and collected certain antiques, especially Byzantine holy pictures that we had hung on the walls of our guest room, but not for trading purposes.”

“Fortunately, the door had left our house days prior to the arrest and was on its way to Europe.”

Mrs. Richter continues:

“While in prison, my husband had two consecutive heart attacks. He passed away on the way to the hospital. They released me from prison, but forced me to leave the country with 2 pieces of luggage. “

She tells the story, wipes her eyes and adds, “I must sell the door, however I don’t know at what price.”

This meeting opened a new door of hope and worries for me.

From that date, years have passed, I have always, at different occasions, searched for somebody, who would buy the door and transport it to its rightful home, Armenia.

A close friend of mine had been interested at one time, however, his advisor’s interference

and misguided advice changed his mind and my efforts ended up in vain and failed.

Last year, in the fall of 1996, in London, a handful of Armenian history was put on the auction block and with the swing of a hammer the door of Msho Sultan Surb Karapet was sold to an unknown stranger.

I hear on the phone the desperate voice of Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian “I am very sad, Armen. I had warned our people. Our people were there and did nothing. A non-Armenian bought the door; we don’t know who.”

It is difficult to close the eyes of the soul and not see, not hear, not remember, as the memory for every nation, is the spiritual thread with which it sews its moral fabric.

The door, which was opening towards our spiritual and cultural sources, stayed closed for us, and by way of auction, went abroad, taking along with it our feeling of belonging tied to Msho Sultan Surb Karapet.

I have written and completed my story of the door. I look out of the window; after the rain, the sun is bright and the sky is blue... but I am ashamed to look up to the sky.

Armen Hakhnazarian

As a Supplement

But I am ashamed to look to the sky

Faced with his defeat, it is with a distressed heart that Armen Hakhnazarian confesses «I am ashamed to look to the sky...». Those who know Armen Hakhnazarian, understand why this great Armenian architect and champion of church architecture, this traveler who knows the whole Western Armenia, Cilicia and Kelbajar like his fingers, the artist photographer, the urbanism master sought after in German universities, cannot raise his eyes to the sky and is ashamed as an Armenian, ashamed as a man of arts and ashamed as a man.

Almost in front of his eyes on the 15th of last October, at the Hall of Christie’s of London, with the stroke of an auctioneer’s hammer, the main door of Sultan of Mush Surp Karapet church fell down again, the door which had hidden itself for 70 years in Mush, had lived in secret in Istanbul and Frankfurt to be sold like a slave in England.

We mourn the conversion of the church of Yagoutia into a mosque, we formulate blames and search for guilty people from Paris to Los Angeles. Who would deplore us, who could not own the door of our most famous pilgrimage center Surb Karapet Church of Changily, which got lost at a \$50 000 price in the storage of a non-Armenian collector, instead of being the decoration of the new museum of Antilias or going to join the door of the Arakelotz Vank of Mush in Yerevan state museum.

That is why Armen cannot look to the sky. Many of us likewise must be ashamed and not raise their eyes to the sky.

ARCHBISHOP MESROB ASHJIAN
New York, USA

Translated by Haroutune Chitilian, 2019, Toronto

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ARMEN HAKHNAZARIAN

1941 - 2009

Born in Tehran, Iran on May 5, 1941.

In 1959 he completes his studies at the Kushesh Davitian School in Tehran.

In 1969 he earns his doctorate in Architecture from Aachen University, Germany.

Hakhnazarian starts his research activities in 1968, when he embarks on surveying the dimensions of St. Taddeus Monastery in Artaz District at present Maku in West Azerbaijan Province, Iran.

In the 1970's A. Hakhnazarian made six (6) research trips to Western Armenia (at present Eastern Turkey), each lasting for almost two (2) months. Later however, he was declared persona non grata, and was banned from entering Western Armenia. Nevertheless he continued his studies by sending other researchers to Western Armenia, Armenia Minor and Cilicia, up until his untimely death.

In 1973 A. Hakhnazarian married architect Margrit Buenemann, they have two (2) daughters, Taline and Shahriz.

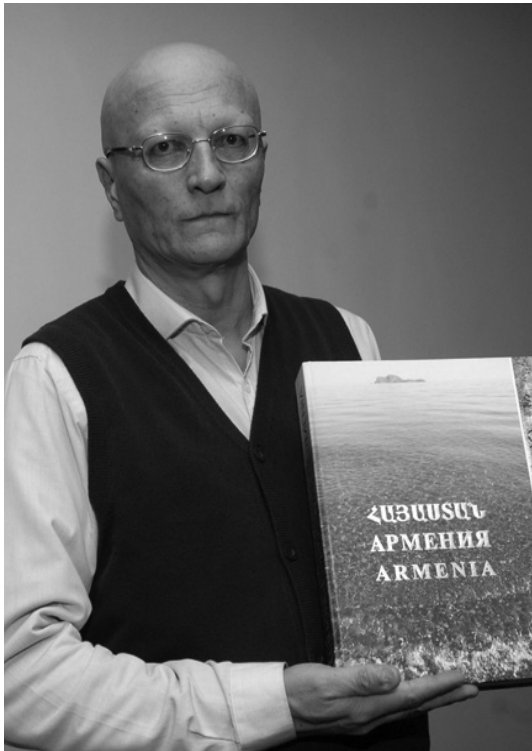
In 1974 he founded and headed the Monit architectural firm in Tehran, Iran.

In 1982 he officially established the "Research on Armenian Architecture" (RAA) NGO.

In 1983, A. Hakhnazarian started teaching in the Faculty of Urban Planning at Aachen University, Germany, his lecturer's career lasted for many years.

A. Hakhnazarian died on February 19, 2009 in Aachen, Germany. Part of his ashes were buried there and the rest in the cemetery of Artashavan village in Aragatzotn Region, Armenia.

H. C.



SAMVEL KARAPETIAN

1961 - 2020

An expert in monuments, historian, anthropologist, folklorist, ardent protector of the Armenian language, Samvel Karapetian has his roots in the village of Bardagh in the Province of Ardjesh. He was born in Yerevan, graduated from the Missak Manoushian #48 school.

He started the study of nature of Soviet Armenia in 1975 and then on and since 1978 he researched, photographed, surveyed, described and filmed thousands of Armenian monuments throughout historic Armenia. He was a collaborator of Armen Hakhnazarian.

In 2007 Samvel Karapetian presented to the United States Congress the story of destruction of the Armenian Monuments by Azerbaijani, Turkish and Georgian authorities, and in 2008 he presented the story to the United Nations Human Rights Court in LaHaye.

He was the president of the Fund for Studies in Armenian Architecture (Yerevan).

The author or editor of 25 valuable books and numerous studies, he was also the founder, editor and publisher of a large number of publications, including “Vardzk”, a magazine for Armenian Architecture, with the first issue dedicated to Armen Hakhnazarian.

Mr. Karapetian was the recipient of the prize of the President of the Republic of Armenia and also the recipient of the medal of “Mesrop Mashtots” of the Republic of Artsakh.

Visit to the Door

“ But I am ashamed to look at the sky ...”

Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian had written his “Supplement” on the occasion of the publication of the article “The Door” by Mr. Armen Hakhnazarian, in the Horizon Magazine of March 27, 1997.

However, the late Archbishop Ashjian’s efforts did not stop there. Thanks to his connections, he had found out that the “Door” had been sold at Christie’s auction in London and transferred to the art collection of a wealthy family in Toronto.

In September 1997, Archbishop Ashjian, sent a request to visit and see the Door. He had received the following reply:

“ ...The Armenian Doors form part of my large collection of art. For the moment I am not prepared to part with this object. If the situation alters, I shall contact you directly.”

“As a private person, I seldom share my collection with others. However, your request seems reasonable. Do contact myself or my secretary and we can arrange a convenient time.”

On October 31, 1997, Archbishop Ashjian and I visited the Door at the owner’s residence in a wealthy suburb of Toronto.

The two panels of the Door were mounted on a pedestal at the rear of the living room near the exit to the backyard. We have observed with emotion the Door, taking in the pictures engraved in wood and reading the writings on the panels. Archbishop Ashjian explained to the owner, that the Door had an important and historic value for our Church and provided him with the history of the Door of Sourp Garabed Monastery.

Finally, he said to the owner: “We are comforted to know that this important piece of our national heritage is safe and well-kept in your possession; but should you someday grow tired of it, please consider letting us know, so that we may acquire and transfer it to one of the Armenian Church Museums.”

The owner promised that should he decide to part with the door, he would let the Archbishop know in the first instance.

The Archbishop and I took pictures beside the Door then left the residence.

In 2019, the Door was displayed at the New York Metropolitan Museum as part of the exhibit “Armenia!” which explored the artistic and cultural achievements of the Armenian people from 4th to 17th centuries. Mounted on a wall of the gallery, it was in the company of the other sacred artifacts of our long and glorious history. At the conclusion of the exhibit, it was returned to its owner in Toronto.

As Archbishop Ashjian astutely pointed out many years ago, the Door is safe now. However, it is still out of the reach of our people. Our hope is that one day, we will be able to exhibit it more widely in the Armenian community, so that all Armenians have a chance to enjoy it and appreciate its beauty and historic significance.

A. Chitilian
February 20, 2020



*Յարութին Շիթիլեան, 1997 հոկտեմբեր 31-ին՝ Դոան կողքին,
Թոմսոնի բնակարանին մէջ*

Haroutune Chitilian visiting the Door at the Thomson residence on October 31, 1997